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CASPER FEEN
in search of **LORE**
KING ARTHUR



There are so many facts that a few must be wrong.
(The Book Book. Anthony Blond .)

Reginald Wright

Part One

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No legendary folktale is as dull, or as far-fetched or as distant from our place of residence if we are willing to look into its origin.

Facts are not as important as they seem. Lack of historical certainty about the life of Jesus Christ, for example, made no difference to the spread of religion based on a supposition that his life was a reality.

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Reproduction of the Saxon Vase by
courtesy of the British Museum.

foreword

When we propound a new theory in conversation, everyone says, it is not true, yet after they have seen it in print they all say, we knew that before.

The criticism that will follow the publication of this book will relieve me of that anxiety.

Another idea is that editors who control the publication of new books say, here is a young, or an old, fellow with a new theory, we can squash him by refusing to publish it, and if there is anything in it we can take it up and look into it, alter it here and there and claim it as our own. This has happened more than once.

Several of my friends expressed an interest in the idea and had a desire to hear more of it, and to see it published.

To put matters briefly, I have spent the better part of a lifetime as a local historian, collecting and sifting information.

There is also the Sanscrit word of the same meaning of 'Lelay' meaning 'to flame', 'to sparkle', or 'to shine', and considered by Mircea Eliade to convey notions of fire, light or spirit, from the root of 'lila', meaning 'cosmic creation', suggesting the esoteric side of leys.

The Castle Eden golf course is supposed to be the 'haunt' of a mysterious 'black man' who is said to appear at night. Could this be a folk-memory of the 'black' or beacon man who would have done his work at night?



FOR MANY CENTURIES NOW, the story of Arthur and his knights has been associated with Castle Eden, and, Black Hall, by far more than a medley of fireside tales.

HISTORIANS ALL AGREE there is a 'lost Castle' somewhere in the area and that the legendary name of 'Kamlan', as shewn on an old map of the district dated 1801 (after C. Smith) is much more than mere coincidence.

The letter K did not exist in the Anglo-Saxon language, hence the correct spelling would be Camlan, as written and used in all Arthurian histories.



The Saxon Vase which can be seen in the British Museum was found at Castle Eden in 1775.

IT IS DIFFICULT to say anything about the legendary figure of King Arthur, and, with regards to all the legends about him as to whether he was a real person, Giraldus Cambrensis calls all authors or historians who have written about him the 'Ille Famasus Fabulators.'

THE MONKS OF GLASTONBURY spun a whole yarn of lies about Arthur, they even faked his tomb and put it on display, inventing the story of how it was discovered there, mainly because the story attracted an influx of pilgrims and the rich families whose money (during the twelfth century) helped to swell their coffers.

AND, REGARDING KING ARTHUR'S CASTLE:

"It was a grotto guarded by the giant Belagog and that the Halls and palaces were simply caves." (Thomas's version. sic.)

In Scotland there is a Majestic Hill, it is known as Arthur's seat; in Wales there are a Craig Arthur near Llangollen and an Arthur's stone near Swansea; Cornwall boasts Arthur's Hall, Hunting Lodge, and Grave, and Brittany Arthur's Camp. These are but few of many such names.

AT CRIMDON PARK, in the Parish of Monk Hesleden, County Durham, we have the 'Crooked Glen' mentioned so many times in all Arthurian legends. The name means 'Camlan' as has been previously explained.

THE ENCHANTMENT REMAINS, for of this very spot one historian writes;

"The banks of the gullies of the denes and through which the torrents fall is the Costera Subtas Cunditerio for on this very spot to remove all doubt here is an ancient battlefield and burial ground on which have been found many sepulchral reliques. Across the gulley and a little to the West are evident remains of a battlement embankment." (sic.)

On this site, one of the conjectured places of the battle of Camlan (at Crimdon Park) a farmer, who is still alive today, once ploughed up the skeletons of men and boys, puddled together as if originally having been pitched into a hasty grave. Today the site should be examined.

BLACK HALL ROCKS, nearby, boasts many subterranean passages among the caves on the coastline, some reputed to lead to secret Castles and one of the larger caves is actually called 'Arthur's Cave'.

It is, according to folklore tales to have led to an inland safety escape grotto used by Arthur and his entourage which was described and recorded in the History of Durham County by Francis Whellan as follows:

"AT HESLEDEN DENE in June 1894, an aperture was discovered on the side of the hill which proved to be the entrance to a large cave. On further search being made, human skeletons were found, one of which was of a very large size. These when discovered seemed nearly perfect, but on being brought to light, they crumbled away. History and tradition are alike silent relative to this cave. The cave was gloomy and unfathomable."(sic.)

"When the caves are opened they shall marvel at the great size of the bones." (Virgil, Georgice. 1. 497. (sic.)



AS TO THE NAME OF EDEN, as in Castle Eden:

"Edern was a character in Arthurian Romance who had become known as Saint Edern who arrived here riding on a deer with his sister Genevefa (Guinevere, Queen,) up behind him. The deer helped with transporting loads of timber with which each built a hermitage to define the boundaries of their respective domains. It is claimed that the woods in the vicinity are still inhabited today by the descendants of St. Edern's deers. (A le Braz. Annales de Bretagne, Volume 8)

Eden, is a substitute word for EDERN, a word which means, "Going into an enclosed place; taking refuge."

Ronaldus mentions in his writings of an old myth in which a god Edern welcomed the Gaelic incomers but begging them that his name should be that of the village forever.

AND, regarding the word of Castle, may I refer you to page 118 of the Anglo-Saxon Dictionary based on the MSS collections of the late Joseph Bosworth by T. Northcote Toller, Oxford / Clarendon Press, in which is written:

"Castle: A village / or Town. O.H. Ger. Chastel: Bethlehem / Bethany. From the Latin Castellum."

When the word 'Castle' is part of a place name, it usually signifies the presence of mounds, which were by the earlier generation of Archaeologists attributed to the Saxons.



A RETIRED FARMER wrote in his memoirs only recently:

"Prior to the making of the first carriage way connecting Castle Eden with Stockton, there used to be a very steep footpath close to Hudworth Tower which led over a weir, it was called by my parents "Wearyall Bank."

Could this bit of folklore memory from the past even remotely be tied up with the "Wearyall Hill" mentioned so many times in legends about Arthur? The Wearyall Hill that led one to Avalon.?

Avalon, the Island in the ocean which has all the outward appearances of paradise, and which is being replaced by the paradise in space of some timeless future. The Island, (or the Planet) of apple trees, as Eden (Edern) was the apple orchard.

FURTHERMORE, as to Eden. Guy Ragland Philips in his "Mysteriography of Brigantia" (the name of this area in byegone days) gives the information:

"From Brough, there are ancient trackways through Middleton-in-Teesdale to Vinovia, (Bingchester) on the Wear, beyond one of the manors of the Malory's, (author of Mort D'Arthur) then on to Castle Eden to the Hill Fort which is Eoden or Yoden which engulfs Castle Eden and sweeps down to the coast at Black Hall Rocks."

That one name of Malory, is most strikingly connected with this immediate area.

A Sir WILLIAM MALORY of Hutton Conyers married Joan, heiress of Robert Conyers.

Another Sir WILLIAM MALORY married Dionysia Tempest. (of the Vane Tempest Collieries.)

Sir THOMAS MALORY, (the author in question) is stated to be among the knights in the period of the wars of the Roses and to have come from the Durham area, but whatever, the information gives the legend of Arthur's connection with Castle Eden a coherence it has never previously attained.

However, the origin of the Malory's is one of the most mysterious of all names in Britain, equally as legendary as Arthur himself.

There are many local variants of the same sort of folklore hereabouts which assert that Arthur and his knights still sleep in a cave with a hoard of treasure. Tales of such caves still exist in the Castle Eden and Black Hall districts.

Describing Castle Eden, it is written in ancient documents and records housed in the British Museum that:

"Kings, Bishops, at one time visited a vast Castle set in massive gardens and orchards." The gardens and Castle we are told are now lost.

IN CASTLE EDEN VILLAGE at the T junction in the road leading to the present day vacant property known as 'the Castle', it is said that at this spot during the hours of daylight the spirits of Arthur's knights disguised as a clutch of chickens often frequent the grassy road verges.

MONK HESLEDEN VICARAGE was built in the year 1860 and during it's erection, the Foundations of what was believed to have been an old Monastery were traced, also a fine old cross and several other stone crosses were discovered. It is said Arthur founded this Monastery of nuns.

NEAR THE HUTTON HENRY road ends where it meets the A19, is Arthur's tor, (an earthwork with its scrubby top covered by tall trees) and here is said to be buried rare treasures guarded by giants of soldiers of the days of Camelot. The tor, (according to local tradition) is hollow, and reputed to be haunted by a knight in golden armour, though there are those who say that the sun as it sinks towards the West dazzles the eyes of anyone who casts their gaze upwards of the tor.

In 1732 a cairn on its summit was excavated and the skeleton of a man with a battle breastplate was exhumed. The valley below (which still sweeps down to Sheraton) was in the old days known as "the valley of graves."

On the slopes of this tor can still be seen scars of ditches that may well be vestiges of an old fortification. Anyone travelling on the A19 motorway cannot but fail to be impressed by this impressive tree-topped spectacle.

Somewhere in this area also, it is on record to have been the now lost Celtic settlement known as seletun, a village dated around the time of Arthur.



THERE IS A WORLD-WIDE BELIEF that the dead dream themselves back into the more personal thoughts and deeds of the living, passing onto us other earlier states of existence, and there is nothing we can do to constrain, or to end it.

"I wons stud aside a man at the hamlet of castel dene (Eden) e had a vishon that did rapt e owet of is bodee, e saw ther sum big garden ful wi rype frute trees, in a stranje tunge e spoak of seeing a bewtious woman wi sum miti-ful king."

This note written by some illiterate farm worker was found by a Horden man while he was clearing away old plaster rubble in a derelict cottage at Castle Eden in the year 1932.

There is no evidence to prove this note is a story of some symbolical vision coming down to us from the past, or whether it is an account of some legend which previously had been passed on simply by word of mouth, but I have read somewhere that a stone engraved with the sign of a great King lies buried, or hidden, in Castle Eden, though I cannot find reference to it in any of my papers relating to the late Dr. (of geology) C.T. Trechmann, of Hudworth Towers, yet I most certainly remember making a note of it at the time,

Any such visions or symbolics as written about by the farm worker, are not just suddenly adopted or invented by anyone, but come out of mythology.

To trace the source of such an expanding charisma as Arthur's is absorbing; to trace his legendary connections with Castle Eden is more absorbing still.

No legendary folktale is as dull, or as far-fetched or as distant from our place of residence if we are willing to look into its origin.

It is suggested that King Arthur, Guinevere and all his court and a pack of hounds sleep in a vault beneath the "lost Castle" in the village.

They await the time till someone blows a horn which lies on a table, and cuts a garter laid beside it with a sword of stone.

It is now known that some wandering peasant did find the vault, cut the garter and awoke Arthur who only fell asleep again as;

"_____ the garter cut
But never blew the horn." (W.B. Yeats.)



IT WILL BE ASKED ABOUT THIS BOOK - and not unreasonably - what is it about? A guide book, history, or folklore?

All I can say is it cannot pretend to be any of these things, but anyone living in the County of Durham will have read of Pelagius the fifth century monk who insisted on every man having his own free will - and even without bothering to think will remember that he was a County Durham man who existed in the time of King Arthur. This sort of thing is what makes this book tick, so I've been told.

All that can be attempted here is to try and make a reasonable selection out of the highlights and to try putting them into some sort of order as is possible, at the same knowing that events of later times will still carry links with a sometimes remote past, and by this I mean a collection of mostly unresolved questions, (there are plenty of those) about the inexplicable oddities concerning the past with regards to the Parish of Castle Eden, the Parish once inhabited by the peoples collectively called 'the old Britonics.'

These people (who were of direct Druidical descent) indeed have never completely vanished from our

presence, for their descendants are still among us, and were clearly described by Tacitus in AD 118 as 'dark and curly-haired', exactly as written about in the Arthurian legends of the Mabinogi. Even today everyone knows the 'respect' shown to 'the dark people.'

Most folk in this area used to think they were gypsies who went around selling sanding-stones for cleaning doorsteps, and offering various other odd services such as telling one's fortune, 'cross my palm with silver' and yet I don't think they have all gone from our presence yet, as I mentioned earlier.

Their ancestors were skilled in the fashioning of iron and it is more than probable that Arthur's sword Excalibur (or sometimes called Caliburn) could have come from this area, it is, as a matter of fact, possible, considering that at Thornley Old Hall, less than two miles West of Castle Eden on a direct ley-line, is the site of an iron-age settlement, a site which is recently receiving a lot of archaeological attention.

In nearby Hesleden Dene, a railway employee once discovered a manhole hewn into the limestone walls leading into some long-sought cave of Arthur's. Unfortunately he didn't say where.

At Black Hall Rocks, barely two miles distant on the coast, Dr. R.G. Russell (and his father before him) patiently collected thousands of arrow-heads, flints and bits of pottery brought to the surface by ploughing, an interesting confirmation of traditional identification of the site as being of Arthur's period, but thousands of acres stretching to the coast-line from Castle Eden seems a site much too big for the archaeologists to handle, although there are good clues where to look, as for example, the shaft of an ancient lead mine, (now filled in) which previous historians had recorded as 'lost', mounds of natural gravel where an Anglo-saxon skeleton dating back to the fourth/fifth century was unearthed by the late Dr. C.T. Trechmann in December 1916, which the County archivists had failed to record and the author 're-discovered', also the site of a lost village on the sea banks, and much more.



In 1860, (as already previously mentioned) near to the site of the now demolished (c. 1967) Church of St. Mary's in the hamlet of Monk Hesleden, some workmen while digging the foundations of a new dwelling for the Rector discovered the foundations of an ancient site and post-holes of a wattle-work monastery dated the sixth century or thereabouts, and local historians attested to this fact, some of them alleged it to have flourished in Arthur's time when he existed in those dim ages among the local community.

And, at Hardwick Hall, Black Hall, it can be assumed that there once stood another wattle-built monastery of very early origin, and that the great ditch found around the present day building was the boundary for this. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that the site and the ditch represent a pre-Saxon religious settlement. In fact a public footpath still connects the two monasteries.

Furthermore, somewhere near the St. James's Church in Castle Eden, it is on record of a lost sixth century wattle Chapel, about which one historian wrote:

"On the site of this Chapel, (known as the Black Chapel) about 100 yards north of the bridge, between the mansion house and the Church, a workman in 1775 found a vase of thick greenish glass,

resembling that of the heads and snakestones attributed to the ancient British. This mode of sepulture seems much earlier than the ninth century," (Fordyce's History of Durham.)

The following is a signed statement of the incident as written by the then Lord of the manor.

"This glass vase was found in the year 1775 at Castle Eden, in the County of Durham, in throwing down a hedgeback about one hundred yards north of the bridge leading to the Castle and near where two ash trees now stand on an eminence near the roadside. The mouth of the vase was applied to the skull of the human figure, so near the surface as to leave the bottom of the vase exposed in the gutter of the edge, which was mistaken by the labourer who found it, for the bottom of a broken bottle. The body had lain horizontally East and West, the head towards the East, and had been covered with a heap of ordinary field stones. The labourer said that the skull and bones appeared entire, but he was ordered by the clergyman of the place to make no further search. I had the curiosity, however, on my return to Castle Eden soon after to open the ground where I found the heap of stones remaining, with such a cavity as might be supposed to contain an ordinary body, and a quantity of deep coloured soil, which I presumed



to have been the ashes of the bones mouldered by the admission of the air. The vase was full of earth and when emptied appeared to have a Subtile aromatic smell.

(signed. R. Burdon Nov. 6th 1790)

The word Subtile is his own spelling.

Today the vase is known as the Saxon Vase dated the fourth or fifth century, exactly King Arthur's period.



There is a 'Signalling theory' mentioned by the historian Philip Raktz:

A beacon experimently lit at Whitby was easily seen by observers on Beacon Hill at Black Hall, (which in ancient times would have been manned by a small number of men) itself being a part of a signalling system linked with defensive sites at Castle Eden, and although there is 'nt enough evidence to make this theory look promising, there is enough to save it provisionally from being dismissed seeing that Whitby is itself most historically recognized as being another of Arthur's conjectured and legendary sites. With some little patience, clues might be disentangled.

Castle Eden today is on the Northern side of the satellite town of Peterlee which is built on the ancient medieval sites of the old Horden Baronial Halls of which not a single piece of those magnificently carved stones remains, (lost to posterity) they were destroyed by bulldozers then used as fodder for the hungry foundations of new roads.

Peterlee lies on the old direct route of an age old trackway which runs from Cumberland down the spine of Durham to sites on the river Wear near to memorable 'Maiden's Castle' and today's Rose tree garage, then via Thornley Old Hall, (an iron-age

village, also of the family of the Trollope's) to the sea at Black Hall Rocks, having passed through the very centre of Castle Eden. The trackway is known to have been used as early as the Bronze age at the beginning of the second millenium BC. This same trackway was allegedly much used by Arthur and his mounted warriors.

AVALON, itself is a bewildering concept. It might have been the Old Town of Hartlepool as some records do maintain it to have been in those far-off days, totally surrounded by water.

It lies practically adjoining Crimdon Park the fabled area of Arthur's last battle, (Camlan - where the farmer ploughed up puddled skeletons from their hasty graves) a battle as recorded in the 'Life of St Gildas' written by Caradoc about 1150 and preserved in a DURHAM manuscript of slightly later date.

Within this enchanted area there is a genius in folklore for building up meagre hints, as in Sir Cuthbert Sharpe's History of Hartlepool, we have:

"The present peninsula was in former times completely insulated by the tide at high water."

(Chapter 1 page 2)



IT MAY BE GOING TOO FAR to suggest that Merlin, (and nobody has so far) has connections with the Town of Hartlepool, and yet he, (Merlin) has (as Frau Jung and Dr. Von Franz points out) in at least two stories, a definite connection with stags.

In one he rides on a stag, in the other he actually appears as one, thus reinforcing the link association of Merlin with the Town.

Carl Jung gives examples of the mercury of Alchemy being known as the 'fugitive stag' hence Merlin may not be unconnected to the 'Hartlepool Stag Symbol' of such an ancient Town - a syllogistic tie-up, if ever, (considering the 'Mystical History of Hartlepool's submerged forest') so if the Merlin figure constantly recurs in our myths it might be the result of the same force of interest, imaginative affinity which generates respect for legend.

There is something primitively ritualistic about this aspect of Merlin and Hartlepool even although it does not at the moment fit comfortably into Arthurian stories.

The lore of Merlin even permeates into the nearby village of Hart where there is a large boulder known as 'the wishing stone' and tradition avers that by spitting upon it and making a wish that the hope will be fulfilled. It was Merlin who said:

"All stones are connected with certain secret religious rites." Yet, we must remember that spitting on a stone to 'make rain' is a piece of imitative magic used by Country people in time of drought down into the nineteenth century.

Even Guinevere failed to oust her brother (Arthur who was also her husband according to the histories) because he possessed the deer and with it the symbolic power of its antlers.

Certain historians say that Merlin was in fact trapped in an oak tree by one Vivian, an enchantress, and that he can be seen by anyone who cares to diligently look for him, and in 1283 Anthony Bek, Bishop elect of Durham met him while hunting in the forest. (Reported by G.M. Cowling in his history.)

Merlin disguised as a stag? This is a possible link with Cerunnos, who once would live in the now submerged forest of Hartlepool as god of the woods. (Myths of Britain by Michael Senior.)

Rumour has it that somewhere in the wooded locality around Castle Eden, in a cave beneath some cliff, is the burial place of Merlin, (as reported in the Dictionary of Imaginary Places and already mentioned) near the 'lost' Black Chapel, the great enchanter, friend and adviser to Arthur, but wherever he lies now, it is known that he rose from his prison in the 1940's and saved England from a fate worse than death assisted by a certain Cambridge professor Dr. Ranson (After the Dictionary of histories)

"And who was the wisest man in necromancy except Merlin only." (The prose of Tristan 13th century.)

A little history gleaned by the author and hitherto unpublished:

"Merlin was the 'bastard' son of a Christian Princess who conceived of the devil, this is a legend around which early religious leaders wove the story of the bible. (From the scrolls of Jawena, in enclave.)

Enclave: (A piece of territory enclosed within in a foreign land - The Kremlin?)



TOO LITTLE ATTENTION has been paid so far to the question of the ancient history of Castle Eden where there is a curious piece of evidence, hitherto unremarked, relating to the legendary Arthur.

Over a long time span some legends persist in remarkable ways. They form a kind of continuous cord of twisted thread. Pull on it, and perhaps up will come something from very long ago.

Guy Ragland Philips, (page 83 of Brigantia) refers to Castle Eden as Eden Castle:

"This place has no etymological connection with the river Eden in Cumberland, but derives its name from the pre-British Hill Fort called Yoden or Eoden on the coast."

This implication is that the name of Castle Eden was given at a time when the countryside around became Saxon though the residents within this 'pocketed territory' still remained Celtic speaking. A time when the lore and magic born among the Celts had fused with the Saxon peoples from distant lands.

That alone might well have been the true reason of how Castle Eden earned its name, because The St. Edern mentioned earlier was born of the Saxon and the

Celtic languages. The name of Eden even today receives its fair share of local veneration, a place with just that right amount of ancient 'eccentricity' that develops that element of 'surely not - and yet . . .' making lore so much more fascinating even than history itself. Castle Eden, a charming place to visit even without an excuse.

So, let us recall that Castle Eden could be, 'The clearing in the wooded glade, also - Edern's Place (The word 'Glade' to the Druids mean't a sacred site, a Sanctuary.)

In those early days the traveller made his way through the woodland to come across some picturesque clearing, a meeting place which became known to the Saxons as Ahl - a place of pagan worship, a chapel, and the god they too respected was obviously Edern, hence Edern Ahl, later Eden Hall, to Eden Vale. A.H.L. Ad hunc Locum from the Latin means 'on this passage.'

At that time Castle Eden was probably a Druidical Academic site, a place where priests, doctors, poets, musicians and other highly educated nobility resided. The off-spring of the wealthy from the continent.

Who is to say that Castle Eden was not a gorsedd, or a supreme seat where all civil and religious affairs were dealt with by the Druids, long before the Bishops of Durham held Royal power? And if this seems

like a fairy tale may I propound the historical fact that Durham's Bishop, Anthony Bek, was once 'King' of the Isle of Man, an island where the people still adhere closely to the Druidical ceremonies immortalised and commemorated at Tinwald. Where is Castle Eden's Tinwald?

Was the arrival of St. Cuthbert actually brought about spiritually with a host of angels, or was his work, in actual fact, that of a Castle Eden shepherd who became a monk?

The answer these sort of questions so rightly deserve must surely someday be most truthfully researched by historians who themselves do not lean on false Roman propagandist writers such as Suetonius, Tacitus, or even Caesar, because the Roman Empire dreaded, and sought to eradicate the Druids, completely. .

There are today certain theorists who credit the Romans with the affability of 'missionaries' who came here for the good of our souls. They have taken Caesar's word for the horrors of Druidism, and yet the Romans themselves worshipped idols of stone, a fact which most people are fully aware.

Were the Romans scared of Druidism? Was it on the basis of Druidical religion that Jesus founded his precepts? Did Arthur, and Merlin, follow the same precepts? There is every possibility they did so.

We cannot lay any emphasis on what supposed civilization the Romans brought with them, without remembering the vastly catastrophic effect of what their ignoble return to Rome left us with, that of leaving this Island exposed to any invader, and of those we had more than our share. It is thanks to Arthur and his selected band of warriors we have the Country we are proud of. It was Arthur who dealt with the enemies of our ancestors, and it is here we ask the question which brings the story of the Saxon era to Castle Eden, and the figure of Arthur. Where would the Saxons land but on the Durham north-east coastline, close to Castle Eden?

"Who by their policies, greed, ignorance, and smitheathenism left this part of the Country to the mercies of the unleashed barbarity of the Early Saxons." The Romans of course.

During this period, (the end of the fifth century) there were no less than thirty four Anglo-Saxon Kings in the history of Castle Eden. And so enters the legendary figure of King Arthur whose strategy (according to some accounts) was to act as some sort of peripatetic warrior with a band of mounted fighters giving help to other Kings when necessary, his activities ranged far and wide which may account for his legendary stories being linked to various parts of Britain.

Without much browsing into historical records, or no, one finds an intuitive liking for Arthur, (the Geordie King) who apart from being a fearless leader, was, (according to the majority of historians) also a loveable soul, accepted as sincere by his people, at least.

Castle Eden, this Northern seaward part of Durham will appear in even stranger contexts.

It may be wondered whether there is any truth in the association with the legend of a secret tunnel between the Old Baronial castle (one time residence of the Burdon Families) leading to cellars where pots of gold are said to be buried. Such legends of impossibly long tunnels are told of many Castles, Abbeys, and Priors.

For example, there is supposed to be one between Hardwick Hall at Black Hall, to the beach at Black Hall Rocks; another from Monk Hesleden to Castle Eden; one from Thornley Hall to Cassop; another from Ludworth Castle (which is actually a Peel Tower) to Durham Cathedral in which tunnel it is on record in living memory of the tale of a man who with his whippet dog after entering the tunnel were completely eaten by rats after daring to prove the legend.

The 'pots of gold' theme is a common enough variant of the Druidical /Celtic magic cauldron from which the 'Grail' is thought to be derived, and it is at Castle Eden, (as previously mentioned) where they found the priceless 'drinking cup' (now in the British Museum) its origin a provenance and another mystery, but the evidence of its existence is known throughout the World, a vessel highly revered and in so many cases looked upon as a sacred object, and as much is said to have certain mystical properties much likened to the Grail.

This Grail is most certainly and clearly no ordinary object, it is amazingly surrounded with mystery, it is Holy, and emanates a radiant blazing light.

"From the Grail which she held, so great a radiance appeared."

It is linked with the sun which since from very early times all over the world has been revered as the creator of all life on Earth - and the sustainer. This Grail, this great and precious vessel, the 'Holiest of relics' and most powerful Talisman.

I'm sure the readers are familiar with the legend of how it was brought over to this Country by Joseph of Arimathea, who with Pontious Pilate's permission took the body of Christ from the cross and while the wounds bled he collected drops of the Saviour's blood in the vessel, before reverently placing him in the tomb.

Although the Grail is a Christian relic, it is still very closely linked with pagan themes, it has the mysterious power of discrimination, being able to separate the 'sheep from the goats' as it were.

Names are the enigmatic vestiges of a grey historic link.

Do not be put off by names, they have more sound than sense and are not always indispensable for the proper understanding of traces of the past.

Anyone who has come across these 'silent witnesses' of the past knows exactly what I mean.

Dr. R.G. Russell after retiring from practice at nearby Black Hall, purchased the old school in Castle Eden which after renovation he named Avalon.

Another apparent parallel is the name of the residence across the field from the Russell's with the fascinating name of 'Hallow Hill' which is so prominently displayed to all and sundry at the entrance to its long driveway. Hallow Hill, so strangely associated with the Grail Castle, the hill on which the Castle was built to house the Holy relic.

Above Hallow Hill stands the high-up majestic Hudworth Towers, one time home of the Trechmann's family. Worth means the enclosure of whatever; such as Limesworth the enclosure of Lime trees; Horseworth as of horses. Hud is a contraction of the name of hood; the hoods of Monks perhaps or of some other mystical order.

Hence Hudworth, and as for Towers - the tops of tall trees which served as 'look-out' posts.

On the A19 road out of the village, at the junction of Hutton Henry there used to stand an old house, (Eric's place - now long demolished) it was called Mapon, which was originally built by a sea-going engineer. Now Mapon was the Celtic god of youth and happiness who the Romans later immortalised into Appolo which afterwards survived in the Mabinogion as one of King Arthur's retinue in the story of Culhch and Olwen.

There are other names that intrigue and are well worth investigation, such as Mill Hill farm, Electric House, and of course Eden Vale which was the original Eden Hall, ironically, as already discussed in earlier pages known to the Saxons as Ahl - a meeting place of pagan worship, a chapel, and the god they respected was obviously Edern, hence the Eden Hall.

The word chapel reminds us of the lost chapel known to have existed somewhere in the Castle grounds, which was most probably prior to the 'lost' Castle of Robert De Brus, maybe even earlier. And, Robert De Brus was never King of Scotland - as some people imagine him to have been.)

Old gods still exist in the shadows at Castle Eden, and though much of the fantasy of Arthur's link with the village can be dismissed, the question is whether it all can.

The late Rev. Sydney Smith of Hesleden, (old Castle Eden Colliery) in 1945 once showed me some papers in his possession concerning two caves or grottoes upon the North bank of Castle Eden Parish dug out of the solid rock and could contain more than a hundred men. The passage leading up to it was both narrow and dangerous with access to it being most perilous. Most probably these sort of Subterranean chambers were some form of secure retreat in times of extreme danger.

As far as I am aware after researching all of the writings of local historians, (Surtees and Whellan included) I have read nothing which might even sound reminiscent of these caves, excepting some reference in Whellan of a giants cave in the locality of upper Hesleden Dene, somewhere in the district of Eden Vale, (the old Eden Hall) and this also concerned some rite connected with a magical and Talismanic vessel (the Castle Eden vase?) which as previously mentioned suggests it could be a legendary memory of the old mythical magic vessel, disguised of course, in some form as the 'Holy Grail.'

It is suggested in one publication that 'these type of drinking cups were known as 'Jars of the mound-folk.'

I have never been able to confirm this supposition although an aged and respected resident of the village nearing 86 years of age, who had been a life long butler in the Burdon household informed me he

had heard of the legend, and of the mound-folk. He had also read, or heard about it, (or it was in his sub-conscious) but he had a strong belief himself of the tale of a hero being buried in some strategic position in the Castle Eden Parish, and there are several possible sites which I found out later from the writings of a historic bard who Whellan said 'lived in the woods'.

The Olam manuscripts (page 193) also borders on a similar tale, so, since the legend without any doubt belongs to very old Celtic lore, there is no reason why Arthur should not be that hero.

This statement makes no claim, nor does it express regrets for it having been made, bearing in mind that the story-teller in olden days was outside society as he wandered like a Gypsy telling tales which were rarely his own.

I do believe that these kind of peculiar Arthurian tales stems from our Celtic/Druidical background and owes nothing whatsoever to medieval writers whose arguments about myths, folklore, origins and influences, though fascinating sometimes obscure the stories themselves.

The name 'Butler' was the one given to the 'cup bearer' of some vessel of real Holy relic which was used officially in King Arthur's court for administering formal oaths or for some other special ceremony.

And the legend of the Eden Vale (Eden Hall)

hobgoblins who used to come up out of the well whenever one drew water, (one version says a witch) both seem irrelevant in these modern times, but it is irresistible not to mention them in this history, nevertheless, seeing there can be little doubt the folklore reference could be authentic. This tale and many more are somewhat reminiscent of the Castle Eden area as if they were necessary to show further reason to think they once existed.

There is the instance of another 'Holy Well'

on an island farm which it is said once lay somewhere one and a half miles North of Castle Eden though neither its name or whereabouts have ever came down to us, excepting in historical references there is some vague mention of such a kind of farm under the name of Seletun - now also lost. (The island farm among the gorse bushes.)

And somewhere there is a St. Michael's well, the archangel whose services were needed to combat the forces of evil. Whether there is any significance in these folklore tales I cannot say, but when a query asking for information appeared in the local paper I got the following letter (one of many) from Elizabeth Davison of Hartlepool:

"Regarding the Article on King Arthur, it reminded me of a piece of folklore told to me years ago.

King Arthur once shaved his head before walking through Castle Eden Dene.

Folklore has an origin down through the centuries, it bears some grain of truth. It would appear that King Arthur was familiar with the district around Castle Eden. " (sic.)

To me this sounds like some journey of penance but to whom? And where? (It was four hundred years before Cuthbert.)

There are certainly some puzzling passages here which seem to owe nothing to recorded history but seem to have their origin much further back, even before Arthur, to Celtic paganism.

It was suggested to the writer by Councillor Tom Fallow of Black Hall, (who actually handled some of them prior to their destruction) that old manuscripts contained in leather-bound trunks, old deeds, seals and other relics relating to Castle Eden 'mansions' going back to the tenth and eleventh centuries were wantonly burned during the 'clearing-out' process of Hudworth Towers, following the death of C.T. Trechmann.

This residential Hudworth 'mansion' (today's owners Thomas Crawford Ltd, civil engineers) commands a tremendous view across the North Sea approaches, and only

those people who have been privileged to look out of the upper windows can appreciate the vast distances one can look out to sea.

This house it has been said was 'much used by the Ancient family of the Maeleries (the Malory's?) the name of the author of Morte D'Arthur, though it is necessary to preserve caution in dealing with this information, yet to dismiss it too lightly would be to destroy the possible theory that it could produce some evidence of the fact that today's Hudworth Towers was built upon the site of some much older settlement - also tied up with the Malory's.

The Malory families owned many estates in County Durham, (according to papers in the archives) and a Thomas Malory is therefore possible.

Were the Malory's descendants of a pre-Celtic race and was the name only used as a 'pen-name' by some other person? Why not? Was that person's family favoured of the Celts, Saxons, or even the Plantagenet Royal household? The same Regal family mentioned in the histories of the Burdon's of Castle Eden.

"One of the few (the Burdon family) who can trace their estates back to the Plantagenet times" (H.B. Tristram)

A Tristram was one of Arthur's Knights and the family name goes back to King Mark of Cornwall.

Let us make confusion utterly confounded. There's numerous other candidates of Arthurian tales hereabouts.

I could supply many places, especially the limestone coastline of Black Hall Rocks, which, since I can remember have been described by local people as 'nobbut olde caves, crevisses, or olde cragge's' where knights could slide down pot-holes from the bank tops and emerge at the foot of the cliffs onto the sandy beaches, quick and secret ways of attacking some unsuspecting enemy who happened to be landing on the sea-shore. The legend seems not too far-fetched.

Not only are there 'Giants Chambers' among these rocks but not far away at Crimdon, (old Camlann) there used to be a large round cavity cut out of the rock on the bank tops some thirty yards in diameter which is thought to have been the base of a wattle-chapel around the Sixth century and thatched with local bracken, the site where civil servant Val Joyce of Crimdon Terrace told me there was "some spell of magic thereabouts."

I assume this chapel (a name of the old Saxon 'meeting place') not to be in the Christian sense too much, but used as a meeting place, although a pagan place of worship cannot be ruled out, considering there is an old un-mapped track from this spot leading over the fields to a witches coven at nearby Hart village, (today's Church is built up on it) where ancient records show such entries of several witches who were led by one Mother Midnight.

This is a village known to have had several pagan shrines dedicated to Vinotomis. The coven which once stood on the site of St. Mary Magdalene was probably burnt to the ground by invading Vikings.

Since this is an imaginative exercise which nobody will treat as authentic history, I have allowed myself to be governed by the rules of poetry,

What communicates simply and sufficiently, and sounds best, is best.

In short I have read and re-read, searched and re-searched most works of Arthurian legend as I could lay my hands on, from now on I'll adhere to the principal that what sounds and looks right is acceptable in the context of pure imagination, as in my research of Arthur I find that all historians have (more not less) arranged their facts to suit their stories, and when short of facts they have invented them, historically speaking, from Malory's Mort D'Arthur to Tennyson's Idylls of the Kings, from Parsival to Camelot.

Contrary to these views I think it is certain that Arthur was a real person, and I believe the same applies to Merlin.



Between the lower reaches of Trimdon village and via Coxhoe old Hall, (the one time home of the Browning poetical family) to Sherburn Village, (Anglo-Saxon for 'clear running water') and barely three miles due North of Durham City there is on old maps of the area a stretch of land named Garmondsway, (a place mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles) where it is recorded that King Canute (Cnut), camped here when he shaved his head to walk bare-footed to St. Cuthbert's shrine in the Cathedral.

This spot is near to the place known today as 'running waters' where the little wayside pub - the Three Horse Shoes - faces a small roadside petrol filling station, right here, in Saxon times, carved out of the (then) precipitous limestone rock face, was a huge cave where the Kings Canute, Oswy, Edwin, Oswald, and Egefrid made frequent visits to. It was the meeting place through those tenuous years for Royals and their entourage. And Arthur? Why not indeed.

This history of the spot being used by Kings gave rise to the name of today's steep incline on the modern motorway which starts at the old Royal meeting place to climb Northwards from 'running Waters' to the Shadforth/Cassop road junctions.

The name of the bank today is said to be either Signing Bank or Asylum Bank.

Signing Bank being a relic from the days when people were supposed to make the sign of the cross on first sighting the towers of Durham Cathedral in the distance.

Asylum Bank was probably adopted by the many people who at one time in the past would be regular travellers down the steep incline to reach the Sherburn House Hospital (now a senior citizens residence) which was in those days a place for the mentally sick.

Signing bank was the name nearest to the correct one, and it was derived from another totally unexpected quarter.

Allow me to explain: In the 1894 publication of the 'Anglo-Saxon Dictionary' by Clark Hall it is written:

"Words beginning with K will be found under C" and on page 56 it explains:

"Cing, (King) Cining = cyning, pronounced as Signing." There is no K in the Saxon old language. Obviously the name of the bank is King's Bank - a proud name.

In this district where Kings and knights once con-sorted, excavations in the twelfth century revealed the outline of a massive cave carved out of the rocks like some great Hall which was thought to be of post-Roman period. (Hitherto unrecorded by previous historians

The surrounding wooden towers and palisades rotted, their base became ploughed over and forgotten and only tenacity of legend has perpetuated the real significance of this broad ancient scrub-fringed (now a quarry in places) hillside set on Garmondsway.

Folklore has always surrounded it, and although there seems to be no established connection between this and Camelot, it lies on the doorstep, as it were of legendary 'Maiden Castle' which was in those far-

off days set on the sweeping banks of the river Wear (a name bestowed upon it by the Celtic Priests and means 'swift water') where Shinncliffe bottom's join today's college of Houghall. (Shinncliffe means 'shining Cliff' - most probably a beacon site.

Even Surtees (the historian) was as mystified as the rest of us when he described the tor on which Durham's 'Maiden Castle' once stood encompassed by deep woodlands on steep slopes providing an ideal setting for Royalty. The name 'Maidens Castle' again is a name used often in all Arthurian Romances, a tale well worth looking into to.

Being true to the context of myth, Arthur is still appropriately enough found in crucial patches of Durham County's history.

"A man most truly worthy to be proclaimed as King in true histories instead of in mere fables." So wrote Calius.

Our historians, however, habitually gloss over facts. Where they come up against the snag of having to write the truth, they write it off by saying that this or that is either 'lost in obscurity' or 'gone astray' in the mist of antiquity; common parlance devices, or 'get outs'; what the RAF still describe as 'evasive action.'

More especially as is the case with regard to Arthur in Castle Eden.

Whether or not anything can ever be squeezed out of these cryptic hints, they show some need for collation of facts.

The same is true of the historical research hereabouts where it is out-running archaeological white-wash and only building up unresolved tension.

There is much more waiting to be discovered about Castle Eden and Arthur which will harmonise with the data.

A purely oral tradition, more or less, from thousands of years ago is a hard thing to admit, and even if it was all written down. Where was it written down?

No two tales of Arthur are precisely the same, and careful comparison of given hints of his North-eastern connection could become an original, although we are unlikely to recover it after so many years. We can only try.

"Arthur, the desired of the people." As he was called in an old Breton register.

Skeptics will object - and rightly so - that some of the foregoing paragraphs are a chain of unproved hypothesis. But even here, it is fair to remark that some of the major archaeological work owes its inception to un-academic zealots whom all too many scholars dismissed, even considering that the lunatic fringe had to be dealt with.

Many investigators today are disposed to accept the area in general as of having Arthurian connections, if not the legends in detail.

In assessing the value of this tradition regarding Castle Eden we must query as to whether the idea is credible. The answer is that it fits very well, as Tony Cook on Tyne Tees television on St. George's day 1985 stated to the viewers:

"King Arthur at Castle Eden could well turn out to be some 'lost Geordie King' who once saved the British Isles."

One day we may discover that the fact has been more truly potent than the legend, after all.

"For it is that the graves of Arthur and Guinevere are yet to be discovered somewhere buried in a cave, nor will this memory ever die out."

The way the myth of the cave(more so than the Castle or Palace even) effects everyone of us in this universe, however, is more real than most of us care to admit, as myths are never gracious fictions but convey in imaginary form the fundamental truths of life.

The whole area has many fascinating caves and grottoes, and it is hardly necessary to emphasise the significance of caves held sacred throughout the world, including those in Christianity, and it is no accident that the Virgin Mary manifests herself in caves such as at Lourdes, nor that tradition places the birth of Christ in a cave serving as a stable, nor to the fact he was buried in one after the crucifixion.

In the Paleolithic era, human beings actually lived and slept in caves, they were still scratching around in animal skins.

Crypts (which are still caves in the true sense of the word) so evidently and historically are recorded as places of high reverence underneath Romanesque Churches make obvious the importance of how sacred caves were considered to be religious throughout the world.

Returning to our Celtic inheritance, it came in a more direct line from the Neolithic era, with natural or engineered caves, some a single chamber, but most importantly some consisting of long corridors, strange and secret routes, some in L shape which led to some sanctuary chamber very deep in the Earth.

The entrance to any of these sort of caves was always very low and hidden from prying eyes, but after one entered it grew as one proceeded further, to what other cavern it was connected up with, sometimes traversing tremendous distances.

Even in our technocratic age, the history of all of these caves together with the folklore, legends, and memories, still lives with us and in the surrounding countryside.

Legend, and I believe nothing more substantial, claims that, there is a mile-long secret subterranean tunnel leading to a cave large enough to hold more than one hundred men and their steeds on the site of Thornley Hall. It is known as the 'knight's cave.' (Whellan's History of Durham.)

The most magnificent cave ever recorded in literature must be the one in the 'Book of Places' by Manguel & Gundalupi, the description is as follows:

"The cave is some ninety feet deep and can accommodate a cart complete with mules, any traveller will eventually see one of the most beautiful meadows ever created by nature.

Beyond the meadow - but still within the cave-
rises a sumptuous Castle, the walls of which seem
to be made of limpid chrystal.

The Castle gates will open and a venerable old
man will appear, he will invite the traveller into
the Castle and show him a large alabaster hall con-
taining the marble tomb of one of the bravest Kings
in History who has lain there since Merlin the mag-
ician cast a spell on him.

Also nearby sleeps Guinevere his Queen, while
knights walk around the castle like enchanted ghosts.

Travellers will assume that they have spent two
or three days contemplating these marvels.

In fact upon leaving the cave they will find that
barely a few seconds have elapsed."

Virtually every central Church in the world seems
to have been built on the site of what was formally an
ancient cave (or catacombs), and Egyption Royalty were
buried in caves, (the valley of the Kings) and no doubt
come armageddon, or Star Wars, humanity will once more
resort to the safety and seclusion of cave life, and
probably respect them as much as our ancestors did.



After the cave era there followed the first domest-
ic buildings in the dense forest which surrounded the
Castle Eden denes and vales, domestic only in the sense
that several families often lived together in shelters
constructed on dry stone foundations of wattle and daub
walling and thatched roofs.

These buildings, if they could be called such, were,
as far as we can ascertain, circular with some central
hearth, usually under a hole in the roof so as to let
the smoke out.

The leader (or family elder) would sit in a ring
around the fire on the straw covered floor where they
ate from some cauldron held over the flames.

These type of dwellings were of course for the
elite, the poorer peasants existed (which is just
about the right word to use) in much smaller places,
still circular but without foundations and they shar-
ed their accommodation with livestock, dirty, filthy,
and smoke filled.

As you see, it was this custom of sitting around
the fire that gave rise to the legends of the round
table.

Many of the Hill Forts (sometimes today referr-
ed to as earthworks) from the early Iron-age fell in-
to disuse during the Roman occupation, (and the Rom-
ans never built any roads in the true sense of the
word) they merely re-surfaced routes that were al-
ready there, pre-historic roads.

Castles in this era was an anachronism (like Caesar looking at his watch for the time) although there were Forts - comprising a series of small houses enclosed by some fortified wall, it was not until the twelfth century or thereabouts stone Castles were constructed.

King Arthur's Hall which once stood(reputedly) on the banks of Castle Eden , (Yoden or Eoden) appears to have been wooden, but not on ground level.

It would have a stone ramp leading to the entry which could be easily climbed by a horse.

Yes, the Hall would be richly decorated only to show the importance of the chief and the wealth of his tribe of followers.

Arthur's warriors would put their weapons down by the walls just like museum pieces.

As you see, in the Arthurian era the way of life they lived had nothing in common with life as lived by the Romans, and, or what, we have been led to believe, even in the history books we read at school, and often the Arthurian era is referred to as 'the dark ages' simply as an excuse.

They were barbaric times. Read Bede, 1, 15, for his ominous picture of the situation. "...priests were slain, destroyed with fire and sword, only one being left alive to bury the dead - a few wretched survivors captured in the hills and forests were butchered wholesale, and those who surrendered because of hunger went into life-long slavery."

This picture of Bede's is probably close to reality, though in between the lines his insistence came through that most of the sufferings born by the Britons were due to the sins they had committed, and obviously his views can be taken with the proverbial 'pinch of salt.'

All the religious writers of Saint's lives have composed something uncomplimentary about King Arthur: especially Gildas and Bede which points to him having had some quarrel with the clergy of his time.

Modern editors have suggested, and in some cases actually created, changes in the legends of Arthur, even by so much as some vague 'in those days': then set about whole new structures with their linking phrases.

This North-eastern history - the outline of an original research is the first one of its kind to be published and close attention to the text will reveal a lot of uncanny truths.

Castle Eden was by far one of the most important of Arthur's Celtic-speaking encampments, of which all traces of his fortified emplacements has long since been ploughed into oblivion,

It came into existence a very long time ago, even in historical terms, before the Roman invasion.

This ancient hamlet(Castle Eden) has had a long life, extending backward in time from the Iron-age, beyond the Bronze- age to at any rate the new Stone-age, and forwards in time to the residential family of the Burdons,

a family who exerted an influence on the whole of Durham County, which is by no means yet extinguished. Factors of that time-span persist in curious ways.

On a stained-glass window in St. James's Church at Castle Eden is an epitaphical quotation to one of the Burdons showing a young armoured man grasping a sword. The following is the wording:

"My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it."

Careful study of the sword shows it to be a perfect replica of both the description and the shape of Excalibur, as written about by all historians.

A late story says that Merlin, who was never far from Arthur's side at all times turned himself into a stone effigy of a medieval monastic and is to be seen near the stairs to the gallery, and there are many different accounts of this tale too numerous to print.

The effigy can still be seen today and is held in great veneration.

These instances of folklore are not coincidences as some modern writers (and historians) tend to make us believe, or daring feats of imagination, for the evidence of a North-eastern Arthur is becoming more of a probability everyday, of that there can be little doubt, although the mentioning of his name alongside

that of Castle Eden is very rare in the annals, indeed only one example occurs in the seventh century where he is a very shadowy figure, but in any case it is very clear evidence that some Artorian gent settled in the region as Lucius Artorius.

"This knowledge I find in the traditions of our elders, of a very brave chief, one Lucius Artorius who lived in the 'miraculous' (read as magic) Yuden woods." (After Brittorium, scribe)

There is an earlier account of this report by Morison in about 1480 who also refers to:

"Eudens king Artorio and his 'great enchanter' who could turn men into stone."

It is a salutary fact that we make out of history what we want to make of it, being aware that all (even certified) accounts contains a shoal of 'red herrings' and its all too easy to be taken in by supposedly 'convincing' evidence for a theory if we wish to be bamboozled.

It is an amazing fact, one can hardly help noticing, excavations always follow legends.



No precedent is known as to the 'Black Chapel' which is honestly believed to have once stood in the village boundaries.

It seems to refer to some pre-historic barrow where ancient burial mounds can be easily detected today.

"To moulder in the grave - near the Castle." Such phraseology when used in Arthurian literature was taken to mean that the Castle may suggest, the body, and the flesh, it's ruler apparently 'the land of sin and death.'

Another 'uncanny' enclave where black is the colour of death, where a sorceress used the chapel for her own evil purposes.

Both Chapels in the tales are in forests that harbour witches, monsters, goblins, enchanted Castles, and wells and springs, which are all magic.

In the forest we are lost, and in the past, dense woodland covered all England, facing men and women alike with the menace of the unknown, although there was always the leafy-bower for the lovers.

The forests were there before man came, they housed 'beings' wiser and more powerful than man, man who even today has reverence for sacred trees and groves, for it was in these woodland sanctuaries that the Druids worshipped.

No village in Britain can rival the mystic woodlands which today encircle the Parochial boundaries of Castle Eden with its hitherto, unsearched links with the legends of Arthur, or its mysterious ley network which connects to almost every place of some supernatural interest.

This book attempts at capturing the elusive and unique atmosphere of this enchanted hamlet with the hope that it may provide a useful guide to anyone seeking magic and mysticism in some of County Durham's most beautiful scenery.

And, as I have discovered myself, there are certain natural spots which have an enduring mystic quality.

One has only to visit the place to realize that not legends alone has given rise to their supernormal reputations.

Neither does one have to be psychic to perceive the poetry of the ancient Celts, the magic and charm of caves, grottoes, coves, denes, groves, and shaded woodland walks.

The village's ghostlore says phantoms haunt every step you take, where pieces of thong or chain can still be found hanging on trees and bushes, but they simply vanish into 'thin air' when touched.

These talisman's were at one time worn to bring good fortune to the wearer and protection from evil.

As with other pre-historic sites throughout Britain there remains an echo from the pagan past.

Here, in a mere five square miles of mystic woodland anyone is liable to find themselves in tune with its magic, unaware that they are on the very edge of another dimension, where heathen and Christian influences blend together creating an essence of spirituality which was at one time common in many parts of England, and which does still survive to live on here.

I honestly believe those people who have told me they feel different persons after having visited the area, something which could be related to Colin Wilson's 'Facukty X', or to Arthur Watkin's 'surging power of ley-lines.'

If the village did not have it's present day legendary name, someone would have eventually invented 'the Village of Perception.'

And to anyone knowing this district that does not sound in the least over-enthusiastic.

Once you have walked the old pathways past pagan sites, some with haunting evocative names, you will understand exactly what I am trying to explain, something which must have been most apparent to our many ancestors, who obviously found it an ideal sanctuary both for meditation and practise for their rituals.

So in this landscape of Arthur, about which, up to the present not a scrap of written historical evidence for his existence has surfaced, modern opinion is that he probably did.

The magic of Merlin, one of histories most legendary persons, (including the biblical prophets) shimmers through the tapestry of memory more powerful and long-lasting than any Walt Disney creation or TV soap-opera.

The problem which faced earlier historians regarding Castle Eden - apart from the fact their number could be counted on one hand - was the difficulty to separate fact from fancy, at a time when the most rarest commodity in Britain was the written word.

Even today, if you should wish to consult any book similar to this in any library then you would be in a pitiful state, as there are none, hence this book should be read very carefully before judgement is passed.

Today there is much speculation - and wishful thinking - about Castle Eden's past.

Was it for example, once the site of a Druidical Temple, as was suggested, or some other 'magical' place of devotees of witchcraft?

A site tied up with the Zodiac? Powerful energy currents that pass through the Earth? A place where in 1949, one Mrs Dugdale experienced enlightenment while standing on Battersby Tor to be suddenly made aware of figures moving about the scrubby landscape below her, a scene from some distant age, an experience simulated by several other people since then, but less talked about for fear of being laughed at.

It's easy to believe the legend of a King who periodically revisits his hill-fort at Yoden, and there is a tradition that the whole Castle can be seen rising in a mist above the modern housing of Peterlee New Town every mid-summer's Eve - only to vanish before it can be pointed out by the observer. As was recorded in 1542:

"Sumtyme the people see a fomose toun or Castle."

There is still a pathway running from Old Shotton Hall which is reputed to be King Arthur's hunting route, and even now it is surprising how many people still claim to see them.

Serious students of mythology have dozens of theories as to the origin of these things.

In 'Wingate Slack' on dark nights, (a place well known to the locals) dwindling lights that move about like 'will o' the wisps' are supposed to be the eyes of Arthur's knights who await release from their enchanted wanderings, and, the 'King's Stables are understood to have been somewhere in the village, "Barely a turn down the glade."

Avalon, that magnetical influencing name is never far away, for here again it rises out of mysterious tales to loom enigmatically when Hartlepool was an island of magic, poised between some unknown world and the sunset, and there is no shortage of theories as to the significance.

Rumour has it that the island could have existed sometime about 3500BC when Britain was still a part of the Continent.

It was the 'Island of Poel', so named after the Stone age god who guarded the communal tombs where worthwhile people whose remains had been involved in some elaborate ceremonial funeral rite before being ferried across the water for interment.

Eventually, travelling men (gypsies), built a causeway across the stretch of water to allow for the passage of St. Maria, which may explain how the virgin came to Avalon and set up her Church of Wattles.

In 1297 a strange story was told of how the stags, hinds, and their young, left the safety of surrounding forests and walked unafraid, and unhindered, in the procession which followed the Saintly Lady to her final destination - according to tradition in the 'headland' these animals and their descendants still lie buried under the foundations of Hartlepool.

The geologist Dr. C.T. Trechmann of Castle Eden writing in the 'Hartlepool Mail' August 1960 mentions a Stag's Antler he found in the Town's famous 'submerged Forest' and which had been tested by Radio Carbon at the British Museum and ascribed as being of the year 6740 BC, plus or minus 180 years. The Stag's antler was displayed in the local Gray Museum.

Cernunnos, Lord of the beasts, the Stag god who lurks among the trees in the background of the whole of this mythology.

Two other loreful tales of Castle Eden area demand to be told before we turn elsewhere. They concern the phantom steeds of Arthur's warriors.

In 1835 the most puzzling appearance of phantom riderless horses in the Valley of Wellfield, (between the A19 fly-over and the Fir Tree Inn) puzzling because the hundreds of horses appeared to be moving in an easy cantor.

This phenomenon was first witnessed by a labourer on Quite's farm, then again, two days later, he was astonished to see a similar number of horses again, moving West to North-east, (towards Castle Eden) to pass out of sight over the rise, (the site of today's Whitbread's brewery) and for quite some time he watched them fascinated, knowing it was almost impossible.

The following day he told his story only to be greeted with incredulous laughter.

Yet, exactly two weeks later the same horses were seen by three men when they were out snaring rabbits. (tales of Durham Mysteries.)

Another horde of vanishing horses - with no more historical background than those seen at Wellfield was once witnessed in broad daylight by several people on July 22nd in 1892 at Wheatley Hill quarry tops.

These accounts of phantom riderless horses are of scenes from medieval days when animals would make their own way back to their usual place of stabling (or tethering) site, returning from some battlefield.

A John Wilson wrote of the event.

"we stood some considerable time and I could'nt help but notice the white foaming sweat standing on the glistening black skins of these magnificent animals trotting forty to fifty abreast.

It was wholly unexpected, an extraordinary sight, and my father who stood beside me made the sign of the Cross, but in less than two or three minutes (it seemed) they all vanished - not one of them was to be seen.

The day was close and sultry, we could hardly breathe.

I will never doubt that I saw them as long as I live. I am not an intemperate fellow."

It has been said there are several places in Castle Eden still haunted by Arthur's faithful Dun Stallion. (Freda Williams.)



Castle Eden village has always been a place of mystery to visitors for its size it has a rather extraordinarily many-faceted history.

It may well have the longest history of human settlement anywhere in County Durham, and it is said by some to have been a stronghold - although remote - of the first Nomadic Bards.

These Bards, pre-historic travelling men, moved about the country using 'Earth energy' which many people still believe to be mysterious channels of power related to some ancient knowledge of power linking mankind with various and magical figures.

Whether we believe this theory of criss-cross lines marked today on Ordnance Survey maps with nothing more than a pencil and ruler it is fair to report that Ley-lines (as these 'Earth energy' magnetic lines are named) are international.

Ireland knows them as Fairy roads, China as Lung-Mei, in fact they are believed to extend all over the earth.

Even Aborigines make ceremonial journeys hundreds of miles along such secret tracks, and American Indians hold similar beliefs.

A perfect example of these Ley-lines run from Black Hall Rocks, via the 'lost' ancient site of Arthur's Hill-Fort at Yoden, (Castle Eden) then to Thornley Hall; Cassop and Shadforth road ends junction; then straight down King's Bank, (not 'Signing Bank') over Garmondsway to Maiden's Castle on the Wear; through the centre of Durham Cathedral grounds (Palace Green)

on to Binchester (Old Roman Vinovia - where there was a Malory Manor at one time) to Escombe Church at West Auckland, (which was built when Arthur had been dead for about 150 years - which would be 280 years after the Romans left) then to Middleton-in-Teesdale, (here was another Malory Manor) and here the Ley-lines intersect, one to Brough, one to Carlisle, and both of these places are legendary encampments of Arthur's. (The name of Escombe is Celtic and not Saxon.)

We can claim then, not unreasonably that Merlin recognized these ancient magical Ley-lines of power and of him having advised his King accordingly as to routes the warriors would travel.

There is no doubt about that, though the matter is unlikely to be resolved as yet about the plan of Ley-lines as have been explained, but I trust this information fills in one (at least) of the many gaps in our knowledge of Arthur's life - at Castle Eden.

If tales of Arthur seem to be 'a stretch of the imagination' may I refer the reader to a fact that a Dr. William Lightfoot in 1845 narrowed down the birth of the legendary King to 9 a.m. on the third day of August 462 A.D.

"One day our predictions must come true." We have that as the word of a twelfth century monk, a William Thomas Foray.



In the all-important British Museum manuscript, Harleian, which uses twelfth century material, there are various versions of Arthur's pedigree, all are based on fictional history.

" . . . and as imagination bodies forth the forms of things unknown, the poet's pen turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing a local habitation, and a name." (A midsummer night's dream)

And, yet, the oldest myths match the observations of the historians and are a faithful reflection of our everyday thoughts, just as legends are open to interpretation as they are meant to be, otherwise they would be stories for children.

There is nothing more tenuous than a myth; it is a 'channelling of our thoughts' says Mircea Eliade in 'aspects of a myth'. "It is a true story because it always refers to reality." So there you are.

Many powerful figures in the history of the world would not have behaved as they did if they had in the first place not have been motivated by myths.

But lore goes beyond both myth and history it is not always a relic of the past, a quite different kettle of fish, old wives tales, everyday expressions, customs and beliefs, these things are the very Stuff of Lore. Well, there is certainly something in that.

A great many of the stories I investigated in Castle Eden, (tongue-in-cheek exception) came from the source of inherited lore (legend if you prefer the word) and though I discovered no tales of Dragons, Fiery Serpents, Mythical Monsters, and found no giants stalking around the landscape, I found the top contenders to be undiscovered treasure chambers full of who knew what fabulous riches, and though there has been none of these found yet, the belief has never been exactly disproved.

It was lore that brought me the tale of the old hermitage, its stone walls greatly sunk beneath the ground, its ruins now covered by some mound. A hermitage that once sheltered a King?

Although these words may sound too fanciful to us, this dwelling was strategically situated on high ground midway "twixt two torrents of waters that flowed from West to East into the wide sea."

It was surrounded by a fosse so that it was protected as if by a moat, and it was there (at least the ruins were) in the year 890 according to old papers in the Durham County archives.

One of its earliest owners could have been our legendary Arthur, but then lore, unlike Law, is at its strongest when the evidence is weakest.

Over the centuries hermitage has left its reputation of being "just close by; haunted by some damned spirit; my Grandfather knew the exact spot," and I myself have felt some strong, strangely charged atmos-

there, a sense of supernatural whenever I have wandered around the area where it was supposed to have been situated.

In 'Tales of Durham's Mysteries there is ample evidence of Abbots who visited Castle Eden.

They travelled in "a carriage and pair" because "it was the custom" of the rest of the country.

I wondered. Where did they stable the horses? And, this question set me off in search of sites of old stables.

True to the legendary stories of Arthur's stables in folklore being 'just a turn down the glade' or 'barely a turn down the glade', always referred to as the 'King's Stables' by locals, old tithe maps in the archives lead me to a spot which is placed midway between the old areas of Castle Eden which everyone talks of as the 'old bleachery', and the 'old Ropery Houses' (where flax was once woven.)

This spot, just above the Castle Eden Inn I discovered to be the headquarters of Castle Eden based studios, a firm of architects run by Tony Burns.

He explained to me how he had converted the old stables to convenient drawing and office facilities retaining the character of the original buildings, which had been erected on some previous medieval stables.

Pervading everything here is the same atmosphere as of the site I felt at the 'Hermitage' so mysteriously postulated, something from the past that is true,

although not proven.

Apart from Arthur my researching brought to the surface the tale of a robber, who, in 1676, held up a traveller on the highway at "the infamous bank at Sheratoun" (Sheraton) about two O' clock one afternoon whereupon he immediately returned to Castle Eden stables and with "pieces of gold" purchased a horse which he rode to York.

Arriving at that place about six thirty the same evening he set about establishing an alibi with drinking and "playing games" in some bawdy Inn to prove he could not have been responsible for the dastardly deed he had carried out should the need so arise.

The time he took to complete the journey from Castle Eden to York is incredible.

The name of the horse was Black Bess (named after one of his wenches) and though several places in these islands claim this story as their own, the 'Tales of Durham Mysteries' place the legend fairly and squarely in 'The Burdon Estates at Castle Eden.

The older folk around the village remember a rogue by the name of 'Dirty Dick' who frequented the local tavern, but not that of Dick Turpin. Did that really happen?

Never question its truth in the village.

And, the stables where the pieces of gold changed hands for the Black horse, are reputed to be today's architectural offices of Anthony Burns.

There is ample evidence for this tale to those who care to take the time to sort it out, although the evidence in law is vague in detail.

Three other men were involved and arrested, tried, and found not guilty.

Sheraton Hall is still a lonely spot today even although the A19 motorway passes right through it.

Incidentally, a drawing was once found among some rubbish in the old blacksmith's forge, (next to the golf club house) which had the likeness of 'Dirty Dick' or 'Dick Turpin.' It could have been him as was claimed. There is no way of being certain of that.

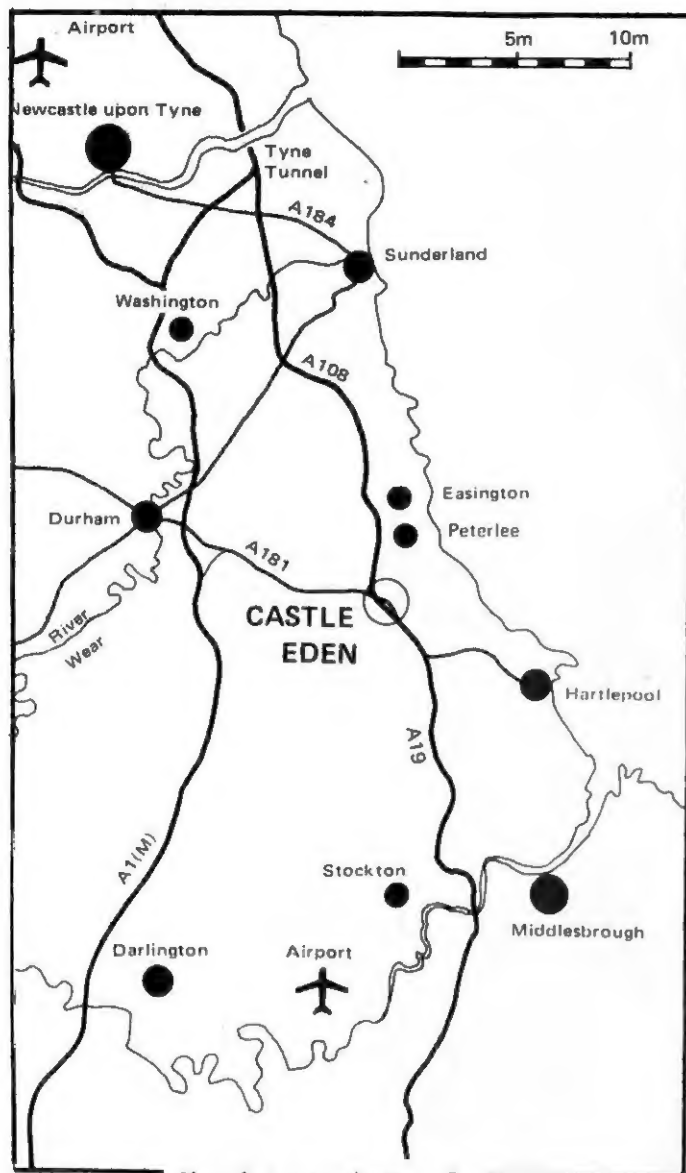
NB. The present day stables in mention, (I later found out) were built by the builder and Brewer known as Nimmo, but the interesting fact is that the 'plug-holes' of a previously set of wooden stables were found on the site.





The Saxon Vase which can be seen in the British Museum was found at Castle Eden in 1775.

(reproduced by courtesy of the British Museum)



Map by courtesy of



CASTLE EDEN STUDIOS

£3.50

